

CARTON 8:19

STRONG IN THE STRUGGLE

MANUSCRIPT DRAFTS, CHAPTER 10

1999

2012/193



CHAPTER TEN: Starting a New Life/ Ver 2

(1/28/99, also 1/29/99 interview material)

I stayed in Texas two, three months and finished out my parole. Then I decided I would go down to New Orleans, see my son, Brownie, and his mother Rose who was my former common law wife. Brownie must've been about eight or ten years old then. I went down to New Orleans, and I went over to some friends of mine house there, and I say, "Well, I'm going over and see Rose." I went to my brother's house, and I called Rose. She had a telephone, and I called her, asked her could I come over and see Brownie. She said, "Sure."

My nephew, Skeet, happened to be at my brother's house that day. Skeet was a musician and he played with Fats Domino's brother, Freddie, in a small band. Skeet said, "I'll take you over Uncle Lee." So him and I got in the automobile. One thing about Skeet -- he happened to have in his glove compartment a little paper bag, a small bag of quarters. He said, "Here, Uncle Lee. This will help you some." I said, "Thank you, Skeet, for being so nice to your uncle."

This is hard to hard to talk about. It's emotional. Cause of the struggle I went through and the struggle I experienced from the depth of my heart when I went through it. I went there and I met Rose, and she was glad to see me. Brownie was sitting alone outside. I thought he was like what I was like when I was young. Setting always alone, by myself. Rose called him, "Brownie, come here." He come and he saw who I was. He was young when I left, but



he had grew up, and he knew me. He called me Lee. He ran to me, embraced me, hugged me. He was glad, very glad to see me.

And I was glad to see him. I was emotional. Sometimes I get very emotional because it come from the depths of my heart. We sat there and talked. So Skeet say, "Uncle Lee, I'm going." And I thanked him for the gift of quarters, thanked him for bringing me over, and he says, Skeet say, "You in good hands now, Uncle." And I say, "So long, Skeet, take care of yourself."

I talked, and I was so glad to see Rose and Brownie. We sat down and talked for a long time. I remember before I went to prison I bought him a set of encyclopedias. They was called "The World." A set of red books. "The World Encyclopedia." And I told him to study, to read, and I picked out a subject dealing with Islam, and I told him, "You study that. Learn about and study your history."

Rose fixed me a dinner for that evening, and we set up and talked. When I was there talking to her, I could look out and see Brownie sitting outside, all alone. He reminded me of myself when I was young working on the dry docks in Texas, how I used to sit by myself at lunch time. Brownie was growing up. Brownie may have been around nine years of age, or a little older. I wanted to help him, so I decided to stay around a while, trying to get me a job.

I bought Brownie a few books -- there wasn't too many books in New Orleans on black history. I don't even think they had a black bookstore in New Orleans, not to my knowing. But I said, "You get what you can, and study your history." I told him that because before I left New Orleans to go to prison I was trying to learn more about black history and getting involved with the Nation of Islam.



Before I went to prison sometimes I used to buy the Pittsburgh Courier, an Afro-American newspaper, and I began to read it. And I kept seeing a picture of a bald-head man talking about freedom, justice, equality, and black history. To me he looked like a Chinese. And I kept wondering, I said, "What Chinese is so concerned about black folks?" This was Elijah Muhammad. And what he was saying -- he was talking about my history, talking about my freedom. I was very much concerned, and finally on one day I had my play sister -- people thought that we was sister and brother we resembled each other so much-- and I said to her, "Levoja, I want you to write to this place in Chicago. 5335 So. Greenwood Avenue, Chicago 15, Illinois." I wanted to know about him and his organization, the Nation of Islam. Finally I got back an answer. Back during that time I was living at 2017 Jackson Avenue in New Orleans. His secretary wrote to me as Mr. Lee Brown at that address. The letter, which she wrote on July 31, 1957, said,

"As-Salaam-Alaikum:

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the most Merciful, the Lord of the Worlds; and in the name of His Divine Messenger, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad.

"Dear brother:

Your letter has passed the Laborers' inspection. I hope it will be approved by Allah.

Enclosed are two forms and a small Muslim prayer book. Fill out the forms and mail. If married have wife sign her own name, or if under 18 have parents sign form.

May Allah bless you.



As-Salaam-Alaikum

Your Sister,

Susie Hussein"

I was interested so I filled out the application form and sent it in. The prayer book was compiled by Elijah Muhammad and published by the University of Islam in Chicago. I still have it. I wasn't so much interested in the religion but what they had to say about history, that interested. Sometimes when you want to be free you'll catch hold to anything talking about freedom.

It wasn't until I got out of prison in 1960 that I was in contact with Elijah Muhammad again. I had wrote to him telling about getting out of prison and trying to find work. I received a letter addressed to Mr. Lee X Brown. He told me, "I received your letter of October the 26th, 1960, and it is my hope by this time you have found a job. I am very sorry to learn of your difficulty in finding a job, continue to strive hard and pray to Allah, and you will be successful. I am returning the clippings and notices of your trial, which I think you would like to keep. I pray to Allah for your success and blessings. As-Salaam-Alaikum. Your brother, Elijah Muhammad, Messenger of Allah." (fn: Letters in Nation of Islam folder)

When I got to California Elijah Muhammad wrote to me again to confirm my registration in the Nation of Islam. He said I could take this letter to any mosque. I went to the mosque here in San Francisco off and on, but mainly I was interested in history. When I joined the Nation of Islam it was because of my interest in black history. In the Party I learned about the class struggle but I



wanted to get some black history, and that's what Elijah Muhammad talked about, Africa and black history. I didn't see no contradiction between being in the Party and being a Muslim. True Muslims, and I wouldn't call myself a true Muslim, true Muslims could also be revolutionaries. The prophets was revolutionaries.

I wasn't interested in prayers and all that 'cause like my grandfather taught me, you got to do something for yourself. Wasn't no pie in the sky, that's what I believed. You can use religion to get some of the things you want, like certain kinds of knowledge. But you can't use religion to get to Los Angeles. If I want to go to Los Angeles I can sit down here and pray til I fall out, and I ain't gonna get to Los Angeles. I'm gonna need to get a ticket and bus to get there. Praying won't do it. Like my grandfather said, the Lord helps those who help themselves. But I did learn more about black people's history from talking with people in the Nation and reading their books.

In New Orleans our union, Local 207, had merged with the united packing house workers' union. I needed a job so I went there and talked to the president of the packing house union, Thomas West. He said "Brown, we don't have anything here. Maybe you ought to think about going to California, San Francisco. I will give you a letter, give you a traveling card, to go to other places." He wrote a letter praising me as a fine union brother. (Fn: Letter in Local 207 Docs folder) By then I knew I couldn't get no job in New Orleans. During the trial my picture had been plastered in all the newspapers, they made a lot of propaganda about me. Now when I went



to the unemployment office seem like they waited on everybody but me. I thought I might have a better chance of getting a job in San Francisco since that's where the ILWU was based. In August when I was still in Texas I had written to the ILWU in San Francisco asking for help. In November I wrote another letter to Harry Bridges about my situation. I told him about the Un-American Activity Committee and getting convicted and sent to prison under the Taft-Hartley Act. I told him: "It is extremely hard for me to find work because of the trouble I was in. In the meantime, I am asking for some financial aid to help me until I find employment, which assistance of course will be returned. I would appreciate it very much if you would state my case to Local 10, because I am very much in need of help. My ten year old son is in school and I really need assistance." (Fn: Letter in ILWU folder)

About that time I got a letter back from Bill Chester, answering my first letter to the ILWU. Bill Chester was the ILWU Regional Director for Northern California at the National office on Golden Gate Avenue in San Francisco. He said he couldn't promise me a job but he'd do everything possible to help me. He also sent a check for \$100. (Fn: Letter in ILWU folder)

I knew the lady what I was living with before my trial. She had a house and rented rooms. Her name was Mrs. Matilda Poplar; we used to call her "Mommie." She had about eight people living in her house. Each of them had a room. And I had mine. When I came back to New Orleans, she told me, "You always, Brother Lee, have a place to live here. Money or no money." That's the same sister, Mrs. Poplar, who wanted to put up her house for bond for me during the



trial, but the lawyer told her it wasn't necessary; they had got the bond. I stayed with Mrs. Poplar while I was looking for work. She said, "I have a friend named Mr. Preston Holmes. He has a son in San Francisco. I'm going to talk with him when he comes."

Preston Holmes came in that evening. He was an old longshoreman with the ILA there in New Orleans. Mrs. Poplar started talking. She say, "Mr. Holmes," she say, "don't you have a son in San Francisco?" And Mr. Holmes say, "Yes, I do." She say, "Brother Brown is planning on going there pretty soon, to find work. He can't get none here. It's very hard for him, and he said he rather go there and maybe be more successful." And he says, "My son is named Joe Holmes. I will give you his phone number, and his address, and you tell him so he can know you talked to me that he sent me two shirts, and the shirts had the initials J. H., meaning Joe Holmes. Soon as you get to San Francisco, you call him, and he will take care of you."

So I left New Orleans. Rose and Brownie stayed there. Rose and I had been separated since before I went to prison. I told Rose I may send for her and Brownie when I got to San Francisco, but I didn't know what would happen. I had my few clothes that I took and I left some of my books in a trunk up on Drive Street with "Mommie". I told Mrs. Poplar to take care of my books and some of the newspapers from the trial. All the people in the house who knew me greeted me a wished me good luck. They prepared me some fried chicken to take on the bus. All of them got together and gave me a little money. It made me very proud. I felt like I was going on to continue, coming into San Francisco to continue my struggle,



continue to fight because when I was in the institution in Texarkana, Texas, I learned a lot. I talked to people there, made friends from all nationalities, trade unionists as well as religious brothers, some from the Nation of Islam. And I got along fine.

I came to San Francisco on the Greyhound bus. When I got here, I called Joe Holmes on the telephone. I spoke to him and explained myself and told him about the shirts, and he told me to wait at the bus station. "I will come right away," he said. And I waited there in the station on 7th Street between Market and Mission Streets.

About twenty minutes Joe drove up. He took me to his home on Neptune Street. When we got there he introduced me to his wife, Florence. He showed me a room and said, "This room, you can live there, as long as you want." He put my luggage in the room. I was tired and I just went to bed.

The next day it was an holiday. I think it was Thanksgiving. The Holmeses took me with them to the house of a friend called Della. She was a member of the ILWU Local 6, the warehouse workers. She worked in a coffee factory here in San Francisco. They had something like a party, Thanksgiving dinner. Lots of her friends and neighbors was there. It was very nice. When I got there, they started to introducing me to their friends, and telling them why I came. Most of the people there was from the South and New Orleans. They started talking to me and asking me questions and I was very happy. They even passed the hat and said "We heard about your case."



That made me very proud, to be with working people and the struggles of working people. I feel like the world I live in is the university of learning. The people are teachers and the best teachers are at the grassroots level. I've learned many things in the labor movement. I learned a lot in the struggle.

The next morning I got up and went over to the ILWU hall at 150 Golden Gate to seek assistance to find a job. I talked to one of the ILWU representatives there. He sent me over to the Warehouse Union Local 6 to talk to one of the union representatives to get work. I met some of the union brothers in the hall, and we started talking. The brothers taken up a collection and gave me some money to help me out until I could find work. I came around for a few days, and I went over to the hall several times during the period. One of those workers sent me to his good friend to ask him for some financial assistance. When I got there, they gave me \$100. Another friend gave me ten, another one gave me twenty-five dollars. I was treated very well by the brothers, and I appreciated it.

One day I went to the Culinary Workers Union on Sixth Street, which was Local 110. I had a letter and my card from the packinghouse workers local in New Orleans. The secretary told me, "You wait. The business agent will be in here, and his name is Sam Daniels." She said, "You sit down in the union hall and get you some coffee. If you care for any, you're welcome to it. You're amongst friends." That made me feel very good.

When Brother Daniels came in, a very short, dark-skinned fellow, she pointed me out. He walked over to me, and says, "My name is Sam Daniels, the business agent here, and I learned that you



was looking for me. Would you please step in my office?" I said, "Thank you, Sir." So I went into his office, and he looked at papers I had and he looked at my travelling card. He said, "You're a union man." "Yes, sir, I am. I been in the union for a number of years. Local 12, the Los Angeles Packinghouse workers, and from there I went down to New Orleans, Local 207, where we had some problems." "I heard about it," he said, "and I read about some of the problems you had under the Taft Hartley law. Fortunately, we ain't never been attacked so far. I'm going to see what I can do for you" And he asked what kind of work I wanted. I said, "Any kind. I can do anything cause I need work." He said, "What about working in a hotel? Have you ever washed dishes?" I said, "Yes, I washed dishes. When I was in L.A., I used to ride the Union Pacific, Los Angeles to Nebraska, washing dishes and whatnot." Then he said, "Maybe I can put you on at the Fairmont Hotel at night until we see what we can do."

There was another brother there. His name was Willie Bible. Sam Daniels said, "I want you to come back here tomorrow evening. Be sure you be here before 5:00 o'clock over to the union hall. I'm going to write out a work slip, and Brother Bible is gonna take you to the Fairmont Hotel and see can the kitchen steward there and see can he give you a few days to put you on, and I'm gonna call him and talk with him."

When I got to the Fairmont Hotel, which was one of San Francisco's grand hotels, Willie Bible took me into the office of Mr. Johnny Ward's the kitchen steward who did the hiring. Mr. Ward talked to me, he said, "I heard some about you, Brother. I once was



in the Marine Cooks and Stewards union. I heard you been in the union quite a while." I said, "Yes, sir." Mr. Ward was a tall, brown-skinned fellow, very friendly. He said, "I can put you to work around here washing dishes. You go to work tonight." He told me I had to go and get in a uniform to put on. I started washing dishes that night. And I stayed washing dishes maybe a month or two.

One day Ward said, "You a good worker, Brother Brown." He called me Brother Brown. "I'm going to put you to work in janitorial, a regular job. Working at night. You're a night porter now." I said, "Thank you kindly, sir." That made me feel much better. I felt good that I had success enough to get me a regular job. And I had two off days each week.

After I was in San Francisco a while, I was thinking about the Party. I heard from someone that there was a Party bookstore on Market Street. I went there and I happened to talk to the fellow who ran the bookstore, and I introduced myself to him. We was discussing political conditions. I bought some Party literature, but I told him I was not in the Party at that time on account of the Taft Hartley. I told him that they had brought me up before the Un-American Activity Committee and I refused to cooperate with them, and they brought me to trial under circumstantial evidence and found me guilty as charged of being a member or an affiliate with the Communist Party.

So we talked and he told me some people there to contact. I started going to the bookstore, and I started going to Party meetings. I met some people who were from the culinary union, which



was about five or six Party members who used to meet and discuss the issues in the culinary industry.

Then I started to going to other meetings, different meetings concerning jobs, or fighting racism, or issues around, housing, issues that benefit the people. Later at one of these meetings I happened to meet Kendra Alexander. She seemed very nice. I would go to meetings where I would hear her talk, and I was very much impressed with what she said. I liked the way she talked. I learned a whole lot from her. She inspired me very much.

When the bookstore moved to Valencia Street a couple of years later, I happened to meet another person, Sam Gold. I told him I had doubts about getting back into the Party. He begin to talk, to argue with me. I said, "I will support the issues. I have faith in the program. I have faith in the Party, the principles, but some of the people, some of the leadership I cannot understand." I read Party literature. They would have conventions and they'd pass resolutions, resolution on top of resolution concerned with Afro-America, and I still couldn't get the understanding of what was going on. It created doubt in my mind. I felt like the Party leadership didn't follow through. They'd pass resolutions on racism and jobs but then they wouldn't follow through on the program. They didn't do what they said they would. The program was good but some of the leadership was bad, didn't carry out the program. That caused me to have doubts. There was also a problem with white racism, some white Party members that you knew who wouldn't speak to you on the streets. Hell, they did better than that in the South!



Fifteen of us was night porters at the Fairmont Hotel, and all the brothers were very friendly. We talked. We had lunch together. The lunch that was given to us was precooked food, and not very good. We started talking about how we would like to stop, have time to cook, to fix our own food, because the men didn't want the precooked food what the cook left there for us. The cook had left-overs, made from other food, and he give it to the help. I began to look in the union books, and I saw in the union books where you had the right to have job stewards. Some call them shop stewards. I call them shop stewards. Shop stewards to see that the company carries out the working agreement and that the workers get fair treatment. I said, "We need a shop steward. We have some problems that we need to solve." One of the brothers said, "What about you, Brother Brown? Would you take it? Seems like you talk like you have some experience." I said, "I had a little experience working in New Orleans on the docks, and working in the union. I had a little experience, and I'll be willing to try to work so we can solve some of these problems. We'll talk to Mr. Ward, bring him our problems, our grievances, and ask him to work with us."

So we did. Ward told us, "You have to sign your names on a sheet saying you want a shop steward, and then I'll call the business agent, Mr. Daniels." Daniels said, "You all want a shop steward?" I said, "The men have signed." He said, "Yeah? Bring in all the men, and we will elect a shop steward, and we will notify the company, notify Mr. Ward. I'll be there early, so you call can have the meeting." So we went to the union hall on 6th Street the next morning when we got off work. Daniels came about 8:00 o'clock



and we had the meeting. We proposed things that we wanted to discuss with Mr. Ward. Brother Daniels asked, "Now who you all elect for your steward?" The men said, "We elect Brother Lee Brown." "Now, Brother Lee Brown," Daniels said, "you're a shop steward at the Fairmont Hotel to take care of the grievances and see that the company carries out the contract and that none of the brothers will violate the contract." He said, "This will work both ways." I said, "All right, Brother Daniels. I will do the best I can to work with the brothers, and I hope the brothers will work with me."

I was the first shop steward among the culinary union workers at the Fairmont Hotel. In fact, I became the first shop steward in any hotel in San Francisco. This was the beginning of my involvement in the trade union movement in San Francisco.

I was elected on April 17, 1963



1/28/99

I stayed in Texas <sup>2-3 months</sup> and finished out my parole. Then I decided I would go down to New Orleans, see my son, Brownie, and his mother Rose who was my former common law wife. Brownie must've been about eight or ten years old then. I went down to New Orleans, and I went over to some friends of mine house there, and I say, "Well, I'm going over and see Rose." I went to my brother's house, and I called Rose. She had a telephone, and I called her, asked her could I come over and see Brownie. She said, "Sure."

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kept seeing a picture of a bald-head man talking about freedom, justice, and equality, <sup>and black history</sup> To me he looked like a Chinese. And I kept wondering, I said, "What Chinese is so concerned about black folks?" This was Elijah Muhammad. And what he was saying -- he was talking about my history, talking about my freedom. I was very much concerned, and finally on one day I had my play sister -- people thought that we was sister and brother we resembled each other so much-- and I said to her, "Levoja, I want you to write to this place in Chicago. 5335 So. Greenwood Avenue, Chicago 15, Illinois." I wanted to know about him and his organization, the Nation of Islam. Finally I got back an answer. Back during that time I was living at 2017 Jackson Avenue in New Orleans. He wrote to me as Mr. Lee Brown at that address. He told me about the Nation of Islam and the name of the Allah, the beneficial, the most merciful, the lord of the world. He sent me a little prayer book and told me that Allah had accepted me in the Nation of Islam. He signed the letter, "In the name of his divine messenger, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad."

It wasn't until I got to California in late 1960 that I was in contact with Elijah Muhammad again. I had wrote to him telling about getting out of prison and trying to find work. I received a letter addressed to Mr. Lee X Brown. He told me, "I received your letter of October the 26th, 1960. It is my hope by this time you have found a job. I am very much sorry to learn of your difficulty in finding a job. Continue to strive hard and pray to Allah, and you will be successful. I am returning the clippings of your trial. I thank you. I pray to Allah for your success and blessings. Salaam



Aleikum. Your brother, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, the messenger of Allah." (GET COPY OF LETTERS) M

Elijah Muhammad wrote to me again and told me "Now you are a registered Muslim. Just take this letter to any mosque. May peace and blessings of Allah be upon you. " I went to the mosque here in San Francisco off and on, but mainly I was interested in history.

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The next day it was an holiday. I think it was Thanksgiving. The Holmeses took me with them to the house of a friend called Della. She was a member of the ILWU Local 6, the warehouse workers. She worked in a coffee factory here in San Francisco. They had something like a party, Thanksgiving dinner. Lots of her friends and neighbors was there. It was very nice. When I got there, they started to introducing me to their friends, and telling them why I came. Most of the people there was from the South and New Orleans. They started talking to me and asking me questions and I was very happy. They even passed the hat and said "We heard about your case."

That made me very proud, to be with working people and the struggles of working people. I feel like the world I live in is the university of learning. The people are teachers and the best teachers are at the grassroots level. I've learned many things in the labor movement. I learned a lot in the struggle.

The next morning I got up and went over to the ILWU hall at 150 Golden Gate to seek assistance to find a job. I talked to one of the ILWU representatives there. He sent me over to the Warehouse



Union Local 6 to talk to one of the union representatives to get work. I met some of the union brothers in the hall, and we started talking. The brothers taken up a collection and gave me some money to help me out until I could find work. I came around for a few days, and I went over to the hall several times during the period. One of those workers sent me to his good friend to ask him for some financial assistance. When I got there, they gave me \$100. Another friend gave me ten, another one gave me twenty-five dollars. I was treated very well by the brothers, and I appreciated it.

One day I went to the Culinary Workers Union on Sixth Street, which was ~~a~~ Local 110. I had a letter and my card from the packinghouse workers local in New Orleans. The secretary told me, "You wait. The business agent will be in here, and his name is Sam Daniels." She said, "You sit down in the union hall and get you some coffee. If you care for any, you're welcome to it. You're amongst friends." That made me feel very good.

When Brother Daniels came in, a very short, dark-skinned fellow, she pointed me out. He walked over to me, and says, "My name is Sam Daniels, the business agent here, and I learned that you was looking for me. Would you please step in my office?" I said, "Thank you, Sir." So I went into his office, and he looked at papers I had and he looked at my travelling card. He said, "You're a union man." "Yes, sir, I am. I been in the union for a number of years. Local 12, the Los Angeles Packinghouse workers, and from there I went down to New Orleans, Local 207, where we had some problems." "I heard about it," he said, "and I read about some of the problems you had under the Taft Hartley law. Fortunately, we



ain't never been attacked so far. I'm going to see what I can do for you" And he asked what kind of work I wanted. I said, "Any kind. I can do anything cause I need work." He said, "What about working in a hotel? Have you ever washed dishes?" I said, "Yes, I washed dishes. When I was in L.A., I used to ride the Union Pacific, Los Angeles to Nebraska, washing dishes and whatnot." Then he said, "Maybe I can put you on at the Fairmont Hotel at night until we see what we can do."

There was another brother there. His name was Willie Bible. Sam Daniels said, "I want you to come back here tomorrow evening. Be sure you be here before 5:00 o'clock over to the union hall. I'm going to write out a work slip, and Brother Bible is gonna take you to the Fairmont Hotel and see can the <sup>Kitchen</sup> steward there" -- the <sup>Kitchen</sup> steward was named Brother Ward, Johnny Ward (WAS WARD A UNION MAN OR SUPERVISOR???) -- "see can he give you a few days to put you on, and I'm gonna call him and talk with him." In the meantime, Bill Chester, national director of the ILWU called, to see how I was doing. >?

When I got to the Fairmont Hotel, which was one of San Francisco's grand hotels, Willie Bible took me into Mr. Ward's office. Ward talked to me, <sup>H</sup> he said, "I heard some about you, Brother. I once was in the Marine Cooks and Stewards. I heard you been in the union quite a while." I said, "Yes, sir." Mr. Ward was a tall, brown-skinned fellow, very friendly. He said, "I can put you to work around here washing dishes. You go to work tonight." He told me I had to go and get in a uniform to put on. I started



washing dishes that night. And I stayed washing dishes maybe a month or two.

One day Ward said, "You a good worker, Brother Brown." He called me Brother Brown. "I'm going to put you to work in janitorial, a regular job. Working at night. You're a night porter now." I said, "Thank you kindly, sir." That made me feel much better. I felt good that I had success enough to get me a regular job. And I had two off days each week.

After I was in San Francisco a while, I was thinking about the Party. I heard from someone that there was a Party bookstore on Market Street. I went there and I happened to talk to the fellow, ~~who~~ <sup>who managed the bookstore</sup> and I introduced myself to him. We were discussing political conditions. I ~~had~~ <sup>brought</sup> some Party literature, ~~with me~~, but I told him I was not in the Party at that time on account of the Taft Hartley. I told him that they had brought me up before the Un-American Activity Committee and I refused to cooperate with them, and they brought me to trial under circumstantial evidence and found me guilty as charged of being a member or an affiliate with the Communist Party.

So we talked and he told me some people there to contact. I started going to the bookstore, and I started going to Party meetings. I met some people who were from the culinary union, which was about five or six Party members who used to meet and discuss the issues in the culinary industry.

Then I started to going to other meetings, different meetings concerning jobs, or fighting racism, or issues around, housing, issues that benefit the people. <sup>After</sup> At one of these meetings I happened to meet Kendra Alexander. She ~~was~~ seemed very nice. I would go to



meetings where I would hear her talk, and I was very much impressed with what she said. I liked the way she talked. I learned a whole lot from her. She inspired me very much.

When the bookstore moved to Valencia Street, I happened to meet another person. <sup>a few years later</sup> ~~(SOMEONE IEE KNEW?)~~ <sup>Sam Gold</sup> I told him I had doubts about getting back into the Party. He begin to talk, to argue with me. I said, "I will support the issues. I have faith in the program. I have faith in the Party, the principles, but some of the people, some of the leadership I cannot understand." I read Party literature. They would have conventions and they'd pass resolutions, resolution on top of resolution concerned with Afro-America, and I still couldn't get the understanding what was going on. It created doubt in my mind. (MORE DISCUSSION NEEDED HERE, WHAT KINDS OF DOUBT??) M

Fifteen of us was night porters at the Fairmont Hotel, and all the brothers were very friendly. We talked. We had lunch together. The lunch that was given to us was precooked food, and not very good. We started talking about how we would like to stop, have time to cook, to fix our own food, because the men didn't want the precooked food what the cook left there for us. The cook had left-overs, made from other food, and he give it to the help. I began to look in the union books, and I saw in the union books where you had the right to have job stewards. Some call them shop stewards. I call them shop stewards. Shop stewards to see that the company carries out the working agreement and that the workers get fair treatment. I said, "We need a shop steward. We have some problems that we need to solve." One of the brothers said, "What about you,



Brother Brown? Would you take it? Seems like you talk like you have some experience." I said, "I had a little experience working in New Orleans on the docks, and working in the union. I had a little experience, and I'll be willing to try to work so we can solve some of these problems. We'll talk to Mr. Ward, bring him our problems, our grievances, and ask him to work with us."

So we did. Ward told us, "You have to sign your names on a sheet saying you want a shop steward, and then I'll call the business agent, Mr. Daniels." Daniels said, "You all want a shop steward?" I said, "The men have signed." He said, "Yeah? Bring in all the men, and we will elect a shop steward, and we will notify the company, notify Mr. Ward. I'll be there early, so you call can have the meeting." So we went to the union hall on 6th Street the next morning when we got off work. Daniels came about 8:00 o'clock and we had the meeting. We proposed things that we wanted to discuss with Mr. Ward. Brother Daniels asked, "Now who you all elect for your steward?" The men said, "We elect Brother Lee Brown." "Now, Brother Lee Brown," Daniels said, "you're a shop steward at the Fairmont Hotel to take care of the grievances and see that the company carries out the contract and that none of the brothers will violate the contract." He said, "This will work both ways." I said, "All right, Brother Daniels. I will do the best I can to work with the brothers, and I hope the brothers will work with me."

I was the first shop steward among the culinary union workers at the Fairmont Hotel. (CHECK) In fact, I became the first shop

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steward in any hotel in San Francisco. This was the beginning of my involvement in the trade union movement in San Francisco.